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SIPDIS

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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS_KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will be visiting the region at the end of next week in an effort to promote coordination of the disengagement between Israel and the PA. The newspaper and other media reported that Secretary Rice will visit the PA on June 18 and Israel on June 19. (On June 21, PM Sharon is due to meet with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas.)

Citing Reuters, Israel Radio quoted "senior officials in Washington" as saying that the Bush administration is showing signs of easing its hard-line approach toward Hamas. The sources are quoted as saying that the White House was not opposed to Hamas's participation in the PA elections despite the movement not having disbanded and its being included in the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. The radio quoted senior administration officials as saying that the U.S. could talk with Hamas members who are not involved in terror. The sources do not rule out negotiations with Hamas if it disbands and puts an end to violence. The radio cited Reuters as quoting diplomats in Washington that the change in the attitude vis-a-vis Hamas stems from pragmatic motives, mainly the movement's success in the local elections and its participation in elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). The radio quoted White House spokesman Scott McClellan as saying that President Bush has not changed his view of Hamas as a terrorist group that must be disbanded. Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli officials are expected to tell British FM Jack Straw when he arrives in Israel on Tuesday that removing Hamas from the EU's terror list would harm the global war on terrorism, undermine PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas, and set the diplomatic process back a number of paces.

Israel Radio reported that this morning, hundreds of Palestinians clashed with police, protesting the visit of Jews to the Temple Mount, during Jerusalem Day, the holiday celebrating the unification of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War. The radio noted that the police will not allow organized groups of Jews to ascend the Mount.

Jerusalem Post and Yediot reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz will this week hand over to the PA paperwork detailing the location of settlements and settlement infrastructure in Gush Katif to facilitate close coordination with the PA on disengagement. Jerusalem Post quoted a spokesman for the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories as saying that the move "endangers the lives of residents of the settlements."

Ha'aretz quoted Attorney Talia Sasson, the author of the report on illegal settlement outposts, as saying that not a thing has changed in the government's handling of the issue in the three months since she presented her report.

Israel Radio reported that Saad Hariri, the son of assassinated former Lebanese PM Rafik Hariri, told Newsweek that if elected Lebanese PM, he would enter negotiations with Hezbollah regarding its disarmament. On Sunday, Ha'aretz reported that FM Silvan Shalom told UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Friday that Syria is still active in Lebanon. Yediot and Maariv reported

that Shalom demanded of Annan that Israel be added to the UN Security Council.

Ha'aretz reported that the Israeli government has been exerting strong diplomatic pressure to prevent the PA from executing some 50 Palestinians who were convicted of collaborating with Israel and sentenced by a military court to execution. The newspaper writes that U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer has been among those who have appealed to senior PA officials. Ha'aretz reported that Israel has also clarified to the PA that the continuation of the process of freeing Palestinian prisoners held in Israel is contingent on the decision to refrain from carrying out the executions.

During the weekend, the media reported that Islamic Jihad tried to fire about five rockets at the settlements of Ganim and Kadim from Jenin in recent weeks. Ha'aretz cited the IDF's concern that the launchings prefigure post-disengagement happenings.

All media reported that Abbas decided on Friday to postpone the PLC elections indefinitely.

Citing AP, Ha'aretz on Sunday reported that on Saturday, Syria's information minister denied Israeli claims that his country is developing new missiles and that it test-fired Scud missiles last week, calling the accusations an "expression of Israel's hostile intentions." On Sunday, Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli military sources stand by their claim. On Sunday, Ha'aretz cited IDF Intelligence's belief that Syrian President Hafez Assad's show of power is an attempt to hide the weakness of his regime.

Leading media reported that 100,000 people, according to the organizers, participated in the Salute to Israel Parade in New York on Sunday. The media also reported that thousands of Jews gathered in Central Park to protest against the disengagement plan. The protest was organized by an ad hoc coalition of right-wing Jewish organizations and was billed as the first effort to negate the organized Jewish establishment's prerogative to "identify with Israel."

Jerusalem Post cited a petition to the High Court of Justice by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, according to which the government determined the route of the security fence near the Palestinian village of Na'alil (north of Modi'in) to satisfy the commercial needs of a private real estate company. All media reported that an IDF soldier lost an eye during clashes in Bil'in, near Ramallah, where the fence is being built.

Ha'aretz cited figures published ahead of Jerusalem Day by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, according to which some 403,000, or 58 percent, of Jerusalem's Jewish and Arab residents live in areas added to the city following its unification. Leading media published the institute's findings that the number of Jews who left the city last year was the largest since the 1967 war. Jerusalem Post quoted Vice Premier Shimon Peres as saying on Sunday that annexing all of East Jerusalem had been a mistake.

Channel 2-TV reported on Sunday that the mystery submarine that Israel detected snooping off its shores last November belonged to the U.S. Navy and was on a spy mission. According to the unattributed report, Israeli officials have not indicated what the Americans may have been looking for. Jerusalem Post quoted military sources as saying that "there was nothing to support the information in the Channel 2-TV story."

Ha'aretz lengthily featured increasing evidence that suggested that religious discrimination at the USAF Academy, where evangelical Christianity is being promoted, has become a deep institutional problem.

All media highlighted the government's pledge to fight crime, which was the main topic discussed during Sunday's cabinet meeting.

Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "[Sharon] wanted ... to put the Bush formula into formaldehyde for many years, and guarantee the existence of the West

Bank settlements 'until the Palestinians become Finns.' If this was the objective, it appears this can cautiously be pronounced a failure."

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "[Outgoing chief of staff] Moshe Ya'alons decision of half a year ago, to set up a task force to investigate the IDF's norms of combat, still exists solely on paper."

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz: "Despite the weaknesses [in his status] Abu Mazen must be Israel's only Palestinian address."

Former chief of IDF Intelligence Shlomo Gazit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "If you bite off more than you can chew you can't swallow anything. Certainly, Ariel Sharon understands that this sober view of things does not apply only to our withdrawal from the Gaza Strip."

Yossi Ben-Aharon, who was director-general of the Prime Minister's Office under former PM Yitzhak Shamir, argued in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The decisive day is fast approaching. [A group of ministers headed by Binyamin Netanyahu] can stop the deterioration, replace Sharon, and return Israel to sanity, independence, and maneuvering ability in its harsh condition."

Block Quotes:

II. "The Size of the Trauma"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (June 6): "Disengagement was a decision made by one man.... What did Sharon really want? He wanted, as [top Sharon aide Dov] Weisglass told [Ha'aretz columnist Ari] Shavit, in an interview published last October, to put the Bush formula into formaldehyde for many years, and guarantee the existence of the West Bank settlements 'until the Palestinians become Finns.' If this was the objective, it appears this can cautiously be pronounced a failure. The Palestinians have not become Finns, but the decrease in the amount of terror attacks, Arafat's death and Abu Mazen's election have turned them into Finns in the eyes of most of the world, and to a large degree in the eyes of the U.S. administration as well. When Abu Mazen came to Washington 10 days ago, Bush embraced him warmly, with no criticism. If there was formaldehyde, it has evaporated. I have no knowledge of what will happen here during the battle against disengagement or on the day after it. I foresee that the formula will be something like this: the length of the respite to follow [disengagement] will be determined by the size of the trauma. One day the respite will end, political pressure will be renewed, and in the opinion of many -- on the Right and on the Left -- terrorism will also be renewed. The coming years, Shavit believes, will be the years of the dividing of the land. He is an optimist. A pessimist would say: not the dividing of the land, rather its disintegration."

II. "When Everything Is Permissible"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (June 6): "It is impossible to ignore the article published in Maariv over the weekend, which stated that on the night between February 19 and 20, 2002, Israel Defense Forces soldiers, acting under explicit orders, carried out untargeted killings in which 15 Palestinian policemen were shot to death at three checkpoints. In the article ... soldiers related that the nighttime operation was hastily planned in response to the killing of six soldiers earlier that evening at the Ein Ariq checkpoint.... To discover the truth of this assessment, it is necessary to investigate the facts. But that is a difficult task, because the chief of staff at that time was Shaul Mofaz, who is now defense minister.... For this, we need an inquiry committee headed by a judge.... During the second Intifada, the army has put very few soldiers and officers on trial, and it seems as if all restraints have been removed. [Outgoing chief of staff] Moshe Ya'alons decision of half a year ago, to set up a task force to investigate the IDF's norms of combat, still exists solely on paper. The regrettable and frightening conclusion that IDF soldiers are liable to draw from this is that everything is permissible."

III. "The Only Palestinian Address"

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz (June 6): "Despite the weaknesses [in his

status] Abu Mazen must be Israel's only Palestinian address. He is the sole legitimate leader. He was elected for four years; negotiations must be held only with him and every possible effort must be made to make him a full partner in attempts to reach an agreement.

The strengthening of Hamas is indeed a cause for concern, but there is not a lot that Israel can do about it. Abu Mazen, too, is worried by this.

Therefore, there is not much room for hesitation on the question of what will happen if Hamas succeeds in the elections. The only thing that is possible to do and should be done is to build a relationship of trust and closeness with Abu Mazen and his people.

IV. "Biting Off More Than You Can Chew"

Former chief of IDF Intelligence Shlomo Gazit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (June 5): "Today we mark the 38th anniversary of the Six-Day War.... [After the pullouts from the Sinai and Lebanon,] the next phase of sobering up is about to be carried out in another three months. Settlement in the Gaza Strip stemmed from [a] fantasizing strategy -- that Israel is capable of seizing whatever it pleases. The Palestinians are incapable of preventing us from achieving our aspirations. What a shame it is that it took 35 years, until Ariel Sharon took office in the Prime Minister's Bureau, to understand what can only be seen from the windows in that office: if you bite off more than you can chew you can't swallow anything. Certainly, Ariel Sharon understands that this sober view of things does not apply only to our withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The same rule applies to the two remaining fronts-the Golan Heights and Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank]. The negotiations on both those fronts are still before us. We should not delude ourselves with baseless dreams."

IV. "Disengagement Is Purely Terror"

Yossi Ben-Aharon, who was director-general of the Prime Minister's Office under former PM Yitzhak Shamir, argued in popular, pluralist Maariv (June 5): "The group of ministers headed by Binyamin Netanyahu, which gave Sharon an ultimatum regarding his assent to a referendum, must from now on stop pinning its hopes on luck. If those ministers do not take their fate and that of the country in their own hands, they will become irrelevant. The decisive day is fast approaching. They can stop the deterioration, replace Sharon, and return Israel to sanity, independence, and maneuvering ability in its harsh condition. More than once, Ariel Sharon has said that by the end of this year, there will be no Jews left in the Gaza region. I'll dare to paraphrase and state that before 2005 is over, Sharon will no longer be prime minister. The moment of this happening depends on a fistful of brave, who I hope still exist in Israel."

KURTZER